

A REVELATION OF.....

THE FIRST MIRACLE OF JESUS

Turning the Water into Wine PLUS THE LORD'S SUPPER

**ONE OF A SERIES OF REVELATIONS ON VARIOUS
ASPECTS OF SCRIPTURE, AS INSPIRED BY THE
HOLY SPIRIT.**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE

- 3 A NOTE FROM DAVID.....
- 4 FROM THE WORD (John 2:1-11)

PART 1: THE BACKGROUND

- 5 MIRACLES AND REVELATION
- 6 THE PRINCIPLE OF BLOOD SACRIFICE
- 7 JESUS AT THE TIME
- 9 JEWISH MARRIAGES IN JESUS' TIME
- 11 BREAD AND WINE – REALITY AND SYMBOLISM
Bread – The Table of Shewbread - Wine – Bread and Wine
Together
- 16 THE WEDDING FEAST ITSELF

PART 2: A REVELATION OF.....

TURNING THE WATER INTO WINE

- 18 WHAT HAPPENED
- 21 WHAT IT REVEALED
A REVELATION OF JESUS AND HIS MINISTRY
A Statement of God's Authority Vested in Jesus
The Revelation of His Ministry Role
The Revelation of a New Priesthood

PART 3: A REVELATION OF.....

THE LORD'S SUPPER

- 27 THE POWER OF THREE
Abraham and Melchizedek
Moses and The Tabernacle
Jesus and The Last Supper
- 30 A PRAYER OF ACCEPTANCE

A NOTE FROM DAVID.....

One day when I was reading the Book of John, my favourite gospel as it is written primarily to Christians, I came to the description of the first miracle of Jesus.

“Lord, there just has to be more to it than a great story of Jesus displaying His supernatural power for the first time.”

For in my experience, there is a purpose, a specific reason, behind virtually every recorded action of Jesus. Yet in this case, considering the importance of this, the first display of His supernatural power, the general explanations I have heard, did not satisfy me. Sure, it displays His miraculous abilities to alter nature to His earliest followers, and shows Him helping others too. It shows us that we can do great things in God, although I have yet to learn of anyone who has been able to repeat this particular feat! Likewise it illustrates God’s love to people, although some might wonder whether providing what most likely was an alcoholic beverage, was a particularly good expression of it! And you too, may well have other lessons or examples that can be learned from it.

But for me the very first miracle had to have a greater meaning, a real significance far beyond the ordinary, beyond the extraordinary even. And it has! For through this first miracle Jesus revealed both His person and His ministry.

Now that satisfies me! I hope will inspire you too, for our Lord Jesus came to radically change the world. Amazingly, the way He would do it was revealed here, in this, His first miracle. It showed who He was, who He is, and whom He is to come! Thank you Lord.

His servant and yours

David Tait

FROM THE WORD

(John 2:1-11)

2 On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, ² and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

⁴ "Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come."

⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

⁶ Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.

⁷ Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim.

⁸ Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."

They did so, ⁹ and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside ¹⁰ and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now." ¹¹ This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him. 1

¹*The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.

PART 1

THE BACKGROUND

MIRACLES AND REVELATION

There is little ‘theological speak’ in this presentation, which is not surprising as I’m not a theologian. However, it is important to establish that what follows, falls within sound biblical principles and guidelines.

The following, from the impeccable source of Wheatons, ‘The New Bible Dictionary’, establishes that miracles are a ‘self-revelation of God.’

‘If it be granted that ‘a priori’ (i.e. ‘knowable independent of experience’) objections to miracle stories are invalid, it still remains to ask what precise function these extraordinary events perform in the total self-revelation of God in history. Orthodox theologians have been accustomed to regard them primarily as the authenticating marks of God’s prophets and apostles and supremely of his Son. More recently it has been argued by liberal critics that the miracle stories of OT and NT are of the same character as the wonder-stories told of pagan deities and their prophets. Both these views fail to do justice to the integral relationship between the miracle stories and the whole self-revelation of God. Miracles are not simply an external authentication of the revelation but an essential part of it, of which the true purpose was and is to nourish faith in the saving intervention of God towards those who believe.’²

This is very much so here, as Jesus took the opportunity provided by the Wedding Feast to reveal both His nature and the purpose of His ministry through this, the very first of His miracles.

²*The New Bible Dictionary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1962.

THE PRINCIPLE OF BLOOD SACRIFICE

Mankind was created perfect. Not permanently perfect, as would be the case with a robot, but with the option of remaining that way through the exercise of ‘free will’. For God wanted mankind to fellowship, to relate to Him, not through compulsion, but by choice.

To enable choice, there must be alternatives. In this case, either to retain the creation relationship, or alternatively, to become independent, to walk away from God. Adam and Eve made the second choice on our behalf, resulting in us all being separated from our God, through disobedience, which is called sin. In God’s eyes, we have ‘died’ to Him through sin.

To become as one again with God (at-one-ment), God requires the sacrifice of ‘a life for a life’. Logically, life is represented by blood. For without blood, there is no life. Leviticus 17:11 states, *“For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life.”*³

Under Old Testament Law, animals had to be sacrificed, their blood shed, in order for there to be forgiveness. This requirement is confirmed in the New Testament book of Hebrews. *“In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”*⁴

This was hard upon the animals. For no one is perfect – then or now – we all need ongoing forgiveness through sacrifice. So Jesus came as the final sacrifice, shedding His blood for all our sins. Provided of course, we exercise our free will by personally acknowledging and accepting Him. He spilt all his blood in dying for us on the Cross. Yes today, our personal relationship with God is fully restored. And the animals love it too!

³*The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.

⁴*The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.

JESUS AT THE TIME

Jesus was born in 3BC and spent 30 years growing up and living as an ‘ordinary’ person, likely learning the carpentry trade (similar to today’s stonemason) from his father Joseph. We don’t know too much about his childhood. No doubt though, he went through the experiences we all face in growing up, though it’s likely he coped with them a little better than we do. But he did grow up as a boy, as boys still do today. (Without sinning of course! Now here’s a deep theological question for someone to answer!)

While we are told he was an obedient son, he did not reflect his divinity in an obvious way at the time. He lived in a normal family of the day, and it is surely significant that his siblings did not believe in him until after he died. Sibling rivalry? Perhaps, a little! But realistically, he had not revealed himself to be Lord at the time.

The only significant event we know of as he grew up (other than the initial time spent in Egypt) was one visit he made with his parents to Jerusalem, at age 12, to celebrate the Passover. Here the scribes found him to already be amazingly knowledgeable about the Scriptures. This isn’t surprising, as he is ‘the Word’ (John 1:1) It is probable that Jesus went with his parents every year, as many families did. It is his age that was significant on this occasion, for it was his last journey as a child.

At 13, he became an adult, following the formal Bar Mitzvah religious ceremony of the time. After this, he would have been expected to go out to work. The scribes would have expected him to have a good scriptural knowledge of the ‘Torah’, as did all boys before their Bar Mitzvah, but his level of understanding obviously surpassed the norm by a huge amount.

We know no more about his life until he reaches age 30, the next age of significance in Jewish religious life. For at this age, the Levites, those born into the priestly tribe of Levi, were finally able to participate in the religious ceremonies of the Tabernacle and Temple. It was generally viewed as the age of spiritual maturity. Although not a Levite, this was still the ‘right’ time for Jesus to start his ministry. Nothing is by chance in God.

It was time too, for Jesus to be baptized by his cousin, John the Baptist. While it is open to debate, (depending on how you interpret John 1:31-33) it is likely that John knew him as his cousin, but not as the Son of God. If so, this was truly remarkable in itself, for John to be prepared to accept his 'cousi-bro', as we would say in New Zealand, as 'The Christ'! These sorts of things don't happen in normal families! Never before, or since!

Over the next little while, Jesus quickly gathered together His first five disciples. So now the scene was set for his first miracle, the first 'proof' of His God ordained, and John confirmed role as the 'Son of God.'

The tumultuous journey of three and a half incredible years of adulation and rejection, of miracles and skepticism, of hope and despair, of love and hate that changed the world forever, had begun. A journey that led to seeming inglorious defeat on the Cross of Calvary, but which ended three days later in truly glorious victory, as our Jesus overcame the final frontier of death.

JEWISH MARRIAGES IN JESUS' TIME

Marriages in all societies are a reason for celebration and feasting. Then and now. However, cultural traditions vary considerably depending upon the society in which we live. So it is helpful to understand how a Jewish wedding of the time was conducted, to better understand the circumstances under which Jesus performed His first miracle.

The prospective groom's parents usually initiated the marriage arrangements, the boy's father first approaching the girl's father with the proposal. The two would discuss the price to be paid for the bride, and if agreement were reached, would confirm it with a toast of wine.

The bride would then be invited in - and may, or may not be asked for her approval. Then, in the presence of at least two witnesses, she would be presented with an engagement present, usually a ring, accompanied by the words, "Behold you are consecrated unto me with this ring according to the laws of Moses and Israel."

At this time the wedding arrangements would be made, recorded in a written contract called a 'ketubah', including details of the time, place (his or hers) and size of the wedding, the dowry and any long-term maintenance arrangements. Another glass of wine would seal this, the 'Shiddukhin' or engagement. This was a considered a full commitment or 'betrothal'.

So when Joseph suggested divorcing Mary because she was pregnant with Jesus, the 'Code of Hammurapi' stipulated that if the future husband broke the engagement the bride's father retained the bride-gift; while if the father changed his mind, he repaid double the amount of the gift. A costly exercise!

The groom then went home to prepare a house for his bride, which most often, consisted of an addition built on to his father's house.

When the wedding day came, the groom would depart from his home with the wedding party, generally in the evening. Once the torches were seen

and sounds heard of the approaching procession, the bride would quickly don her wedding dress and go out to meet her husband to be.

Depending upon the arrangements, they would either go inside, or return to the groom's home, for the wedding ceremony. Following a public ceremony, the newlyweds would enter the specially prepared bridal chamber and do what has always been done throughout history! The groom would then come out and announce to the guests that the marriage was now consummated, generally exhibiting a bloodstained cloth, or a chemise (undergarment), as proof of his bride's virginity.

Now, having received the glad news, the celebrations would truly begin, which in the case of a virgin bride would last for at least seven days. This is why Jacob had to wait until the end of his 'marriage week' with Leah before he could marry Rachel. (Genesis 29:14-30)

During this time however, the groom and his bride would remain in seclusion. After the seven days, the groom would present his unveiled bride to the guests and they too would then join in the conclusion of the wedding feast.

BREAD AND WINE

REALITY AND SYMBOLISM

Both bread and wine played important parts in the life of the Jews from earliest times, as confirmed in Wheaton's Bible Dictionary.

Naturally in a land and climate particularly suited to the cultivation of the vine, we find that wine was often associated with grain, and together they stand for a full and adequate supply of food and of the good gifts of life. They can be promised therefore as the tokens of the blessing of God (Gn. 27:28), and they are acceptable to him when offered back upon the altar (Ex. 29:40)⁵

BREAD

Most often and desirably, wheat was used in Old Testament bread making. The grain (dagan) was ground in a mortar and pestle, or between two millstones, if being produced on a larger scale. This milling process resulted in a type of flour called 'qemah', which was further identified by adding the name of the grain used. A finer, higher quality grade was called 'solet', likely the 'groats' used for offerings. For the Lord must have the best – then and now!

The flour was then kneaded with water and salt in a trough. A small portion of previously fermented dough was added to provide the rising agent or leaven for general use. Leaven though, was not included for religious offerings made by fire, such as that consumed during Passover Week, or for use on the Table of Shewbread. (Showbread)

Bread was cooked over a fire, on heated stones on a griddle, or baked in an oven. The leavened version produced round, flat loaves, the unleavened dough, thin, generally oval or round, cakes.

⁵*The New Bible Dictionary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1962.

The ‘shew-bread’, consisted of 12 flat, square or oblong loaves representing the 12 tribes of Israel. It was prepared and placed while still hot, on the Table of Shewbread every Sabbath. (Our Saturday) The previous week’s bread was then eaten by the priests, but only in the Holy Place itself. This old bread was what King David requested of Ahimelech for himself and his men. (See 1 Samuel 21:1-6)

THE TABLE OF SHEWBREAD

The Table of Shewbread was the first item of furniture within the ‘Holy Place’ (Symbolic of the Holy Spirit), the first and largest section of the ‘Tent’ erected within the Tabernacle of Moses. The Table symbolizes the deeper, underlying, ‘revelatory Word (Bread) of God’, as revealed by the Holy Spirit.

Let me explain. Before I was a Christian, the Bible was the most boring book around. I hated reading it as a child, finally decided it was not true anyway, so discarded it from my life.

When I saw the light (no pun intended) and accepted Jesus into my life, the Bible took on a new meaning. For now, I was learning about my Saviour and Lord. Suddenly, the Bible became more interesting and my mind garnered a limited, new level of understanding of it. For here I could learn about my friend Jesus, from His Word.

However it wasn’t until I entered the realm of the Holy Spirit, moving into the Holy Place where the Table of Shewbread is situated, that the deeper revelations of the underlying layers and meanings of God’s precious and beautiful Word became available to me. Including the one you are about to read! And the process is ongoing. For as I grow in obedience to His will for my life, so He reveals more about Himself to me. And to you too!

JESUS AS THE BREAD OF LIFE

Jesus was the fulfilment of what had previously been symbolic as can be see in these, His words: *‘Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will*

never be thirsty.” (John 6:35) 6 He was the fulfilment of both the Grain Offering and the Table of Shewbread.

Twice, He multiplied bread in the twin miracles of feeding the 4000 and the 5000. *‘Do you still not understand? Don’t you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered?’* (Matthew 16:9-10) 7 Jesus, the bread of life, is able to supply all our needs with plenty left over!

Finally, at the Lord’s Supper: *‘For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.’*” (1 Corinthians 11:23-4) 8 The body of the ‘Living Word’. Jesus is the final fulfilment of the symbolism of the bread, of the good gifts of life.

WINE

Wine was produced in large quantities during Old Testament times. It is believed that during the Roman era, a Jewish family consumed an average of 350 litres per year – but they did have large families! In the time of Jesus the price of wine was about half that of olive oil and equivalent to that of meat.

Crushing grapes to release the sugar in their juice produces wine. The juice ferments naturally when yeast (from the skins) comes in contact with the sugar in the grape juice. The result is alcohol, and carbon dioxide, which being a gas, escapes into the air.

6*The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.

7*The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.

8*The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.

The colour in wine is obtained primarily from the skins, as all grape juice is basically white. For white wines, the skins and seeds are removed at the beginning of the process, whilst with reds, the skins are retained until after the wine is fermented.

The fermented wine is then separated from the grape solids. Today, it is transferred into a vat or casks where it is clarified, stabilized, and may be taken through other optional processes, before being bottled. In those days, it was put into wineskins.

Wineskins were sheep or goatskins sewn together up to the neck, which served as the opening of the container. The skins were filled and the neck then sewn up. Since there was no refrigeration, the grape juice would ferment, producing alcohol and carbon dioxide as mentioned above, which would cause the skins to expand. Old skins would not work, as they had already been stretched and were no longer elastic. If grape juice was to be put in old wineskins, the expanding carbon dioxide would rupture the wineskins, the wine would be lost, and the wineskins, ruined.

There is considerable controversy as to whether Old Testament people had the technology to produce a non-alcoholic wine that would keep throughout the year. Fermentation preserves as well as intoxicates. However, it appears that there were several preservation methods known that excluded alcohol.

One involved heating wine to boil off the alcohol, which had a lower boiling point than water. (Only 78.3C) Another required the wine to be boiled, and in so doing reducing the moisture content until the sugar concentration exceeded the maximum level at which fermentation takes place. Water was then generally added back to the concentrated juice before drinking.

Therefore it seems highly likely that both alcoholic and non-alcoholic types were available in Jesus' time.

Wine is seen in both good and bad lights in the Bible. But Jesus paid wine, however you wish to define it, the ultimate compliment, by using it as the symbol of His blood. His incredible 'saving' blood that cleanses us of our sins. Jesus asked us to drink wine in remembrance of His blood sacrifice until He returns. *'In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.'"* (1 Corinthians 11:25) 9

Jesus poured out His blood for us, the ultimate sacrifice that we are to remember by drinking wine. For parallel with the Grain Offering, Jesus was also the fulfilment of the Old Testament Drink Offering of wine.

⁹*The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.

THE WEDDING FEAST ITSELF

Jesus had in recent days, been acknowledged by his cousin, John the Baptist, as “the Lamb of God.”(John 1:35) The Holy Spirit had descended upon him like a dove, and the Father confirmed from heaven, *“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”* (Matthew 3:17) His short, turbulent, 3½ year earthly ministry was launched, with a heavenly display of affirmation.

Shortly afterwards, by the time of the world’s most famous wedding at Cana in Galilee, one where we don’t even know the names of the bride and the groom, Jesus had already gathered 5 of his 12 disciples to himself. They were all now at the wedding feast, likely having been there for a week, as apparently the bride and groom had returned from the marital chamber to join in the final celebrations.

Fortunately for the hosts, the costs of putting on such a feast were not too great. The guests would sit in a circle around one or more bowls set upon a mound on the dirt floor. The main dish would most likely be a lamb or kid (baby goat) stewed in rice or barley.

Before cooking, the vessels to be used were washed in water, a ritualistic ceremony to purify rather than to be wash clean. Prior to and after eating, the guests themselves poured, or rather dribbled, water from the holy ceremonial jars over their hands, in another symbol of spiritual rather than physical cleansing. Pieces of bread would be used as napkins to dry the fingers. Once used, the bread was tossed aside or thrown outside for the local dogs to come and eat. (As alluded to by Jesus when talking to the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15:21-28)

When the food was served, the most honored guests sat in a circle round the mound on which the food was placed. The special guests ate first, followed by those of lesser honour, once the ‘inner circle’ had eaten their fill. They would dip their hands into the stew, or if it was too hot, use pieces of bread folded together, as spoons.

After eating, the guests, all men, for women were not allowed to attend other than to prepare the food, would get up and retire to seats placed around the walls or sit nearby, cross legged on the floor. They would talk, gossip, listen to recitals, puzzle over riddles and generally enjoy the company. One or two lanterns would provide a dim light, and if it were chilly, heat would be generated from a fire of smouldering weeds, perhaps in a brazier, but often, simply in a hole in the floor. The little smoke produced would have to find its own way out of the room.

This was the situation in which Jesus was found, when the unthinkable occurred, the wedding's hosts ran out of wine.

So let's have a look at what happened next and see how Jesus revealed his divinity through this, the first of His miracles...

PART 2

A REVELATION OF..... TURNING THE WATER INTO WINE

WHAT HAPPENED

As Jesus was sitting down enjoying the company and building a closer relationship with his first five disciples, a crisis developed. The unthinkable happened! Yes, Mary saw that the hosts had a hugely embarrassing situation on their hands. For after nearly a week's feasting, the supply of wine had run out before the celebrations were complete. What was to be done? Mary had an idea.

You see, for the previous, now approaching 31 years, ever since the visit of the angel to tell her that she was miraculously pregnant, Mary had known that Jesus was someone special. This had finally been confirmed when her well known nephew, John the Baptist, the final prophet of the Old Testament order who had predicted the coming of 'the Christ', the promised Saviour of the Jews, baptized his cousin Jesus as the one chosen of God. Confirmed too by the Holy Spirit alighting on Jesus like a dove, as well as the Father's heavenly words of confirmation. So it's little wonder that Mary, who was perhaps the chief caterer, called upon her special son, to help overcome this very serious and embarrassing problem.

So Mary went into the Feasting room herself, or sent a message in to ask Jesus to come out to the kitchen. When she explained the predicament and asked Him to help, He immediately questioned her request, saying, *'My time (hour to act) has not yet come.'* (John 2:4) This referred of course, in an oblique way, to His death, which was still 3½ years in the future. But Mary understood the destiny of her son. She realized the time for His

ministry, as opposed to his death, had come. For John the Baptist had proclaimed it, both God the Father and the Holy Spirit had confirmed it, while Jesus too, had reached 30, the traditional commencement age for ministry under the Jewish system. So she simply told the servants to *‘Do whatever he tells you.’* (John2:5)

So through this first demonstration of the miraculous in His ministry, as one set apart from all others, Jesus was about to illustrate precisely who He was, what form His ministry was to take, and how it was to end. Of course, the people didn’t understand at the time, nor could possibly be expected to imagine or comprehend what was going to take place over the next 42 months. How such a short moment in the vast passage of time could and would, change world history forever.

Jesus instructed the servants to *‘Fill the jars with water.’* (John 2:7) For these, the 6 special, holy stone jars, had been emptied during the pre meal ceremonial hand washing rites that the guests, being devout Jews, had religiously performed.

Having carefully filled the precious jars with about 700 litres (150 gallons) of water, reflecting the considerable size of the wedding, the servants returned to Jesus.

We are unsure as to where the water came from. Whether it was drawn from a local well or came from another source. There is a possibility that it was special holy water containing traces of the ashes of the red heifer, (see Numbers 19) normally used for the sanctification and purification of those who handled dead bodies. For there are indications that this anointed water was in wider usage at this time. But, whatever the source of the water, because of the containers it was now stored in, it was regarded as holy, suitable for using in the cleansing rites to be observed prior to eating each meal.

Next, Jesus ordered the servants to draw water from the jars with what we would now call a ladle, and take it to the Master of the Banquet. Not knowing where it had had come from, for he would never had considered

drinking it had he known that it was the holy water reserved for ceremonial washing and cleansing, he tasted what was now wine and found it to be superb! Amazed, he sought out the bridegroom, and taking him aside to avoid any embarrassment, complimented him on how he had saved the best until wine until last, at variance with normal practice. For usually, cheaper wine was served *‘after the guests have had too much to drink.’* (John 2:10) Jesus simply smiled.

‘This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.’ (John 2:11) 10

WHAT IT REVEALED

A REVELATION OF JESUS AND HIS MINISTRY

Why did Jesus choose this particular moment to conduct His first miracle? Or 'sign', as the Apostle John prefers to put it, emphasizing the action's significance, rather than its marvel. For this miracle was indeed a sign to the world that the ministry of Jesus had begun, a fact we all know. But most importantly, it amazingly revealed through one simple action, specifically who He was and the form His ministry would take! Of course, as is the case with many things Jesus did, or said, the full implications were not fully understood at the time. It is only now, with the benefit of hindsight, that we can see the full picture.

The five disciples present too, would have had little understanding of the significance of the occasion. Firstly, because they had no real idea of what Jesus was going to do over the next 3½ years. For they, like the rest of the Jews, were expecting a warrior king, one who would set them free from the bondage suffered under the harsh Roman occupiers of their country. This action of changing the water into wine would have been seen as a sign of the miraculous power of God being with their leader, a godly power similar to that which had enabled their ancestors to overcome impossible odds in the past. Such an anointing would certainly be required to defeat and expel the hugely powerful and dominant, Roman military machine.

Today too, most simply see this miracle as a statement of the divinity of Jesus. But it is so much more.....

A STATEMENT OF GOD'S AUTHORITY VESTED IN JESUS

Not only is this miracle a sign of divinity, but also one of God's authority being vested in Jesus. This could not be readily understood until after the final Passover meal during which Jesus linked wine with blood.

Today we can see that the water being turned into wine was symbolically depicting the change of water into blood. This understanding throws a whole new light on the event. For this is the third time such a miracle had been performed. The first two showed the authority the Father had vested in Moses, this final one revealing the authority of Jesus!

In the first two cases, water was changed directly into blood, while here, wine was the 'substitute' (As was Jesus for us) for the blood. Both the previous instances involved Moses during the release of the Israelites from their Egyptian captivity. Both too were signs of the authority that God the Father had invested in Moses.

In the first situation, the Lord told Moses to take water out of the Nile and pour it on the ground where it would turn it into blood. (Exodus 4:9) He was to do this in order to prove to the elders of the Israelites and the people that he was indeed God's chosen messenger. It was done as the third in a series of signs, and the people believed. (Exodus 4:29-31)

Moving on a short while later to the second plague against the hapless Egyptians, the Lord told Moses to get Aaron to stretch out his staff (the symbol of authority) over all the waters of Egypt. Then to strike the Nile and all the water in the land would turn into blood. Which it duly did. (Exodus 7:17-24)

So here we have two precedents for the action of Jesus. But as wine was here symbolizing the blood, the disciples would not, at the time, have understood this.

But after the Last Supper, just prior to His death when the sacrament of Communion was introduced, the original five disciples may then have started to ponder a little upon the revelation of the miracle 3½ years earlier.

The authority of God the Father was vested in Jesus as it had earlier been in Moses. So this miracle was far more than a simple demonstration of power or divinity, but a sign from the Father, that the full extent of His

authority was now vested in Jesus. For while Moses got Aaron to hold out the staff, it was God who turned the water into blood. So the people understood that it was God working, not Moses.

But here, Jesus Himself changed the water into wine, symbolic of His own blood, which He as the 'Christ', would freely pour out of His own free will 42 months later. The Father's authority and power was fully vested in Him!

THE REVELATION OF HIS MINISTRY ROLE

But what was the water about? Why water into blood? This is a most powerful and beautiful part of the revelation. For the water in the stone jars represented the Old Testament (Covenant) principle of the Law. For 1500 years the Law had required the outwards cleansing of the body as a symbol of purity. Over the centuries it had been developed into an elaborate ceremony, in which the original simple symbolism had got lost in a myriad of self-righteous, religious rules.

Through this miracle Jesus was illustrating that He had come to replace the 'Old (external) Covenant' which had proved impossible to keep, represented by the water, with the 'New (internal) Covenant' of salvation through God's grace by the final, once only blood sacrifice of Jesus symbolized in the wine.

The water represented the old way of seeking reconciliation with God, the wine (symbolic of the blood), the new. The water was applied externally, the wine was drunk, pointing to an internal change. Through this miracle, Jesus announced in a natural, albeit supernatural way, what His ministry was all about. To replace the 'Age of the Law' with the 'Age of Grace.' Replacing purification through water, with perfection through His blood. A change that has had greater impact upon the world than any other, before or since.

If the Master of the Banquet had realized that this, most beautiful wine, had been made with the holy water drawn from the ceremonial stone jars, there

is no way that he would have drunk it, no matter how good the taste. For it would have been anathema to him.

Today too, we still have people who try to find their way to heaven through living good lives, attempting the impossible task of keeping the law. How sad it is to know that they are doomed to failure, for no person has ever been able to fulfil God's requirement of 100% compliance all the time.

Yes, Jesus came with a new and better way, a way He revealed through His first miracle. A future of reconciliation with God that we can all participate in, provided we are personally prepared to accept the sacrifice He made on our behalf. I've accepted His offer. How about you?

THE REVELATION OF A NEW PRIESTHOOD

The typical pattern in which God acts is one of 'threes'. (See Revelation of... The Power of Three) A prime example is found in the Godhead itself. This principle permeates God's actions from the design of the first church, the Tabernacle of Moses with its Outer Court, Holy Place and Holy of Holies. It remains the pattern for today's church too. (See Revelation of... The Tabernacle Church) In the New Testament, we find the triad of faith, hope and love, together with many other examples of the application of 'threes' in God's order.

Along with the wine at the wedding feast, copious quantities of bread were consumed. Bread and wine in early times, signified the ample provision of God, for when both were plentiful, God's abundant physical blessings were upon the people. Remember the principle... 'first in the natural, then in the spiritual.' So bread and wine have always been associated with the Priesthood, spiritual nourishment and blessing too.

This can first be seen way back, over 4000 years ago, in the time of Abraham, where we have the revelation of first 'order' of the priesthood, in the person of Melchizedek. And what did Melchizedek do? He brought out bread and wine and blessed Abraham upon his return from a successful battle. (Genesis 14:18-20)

Six hundred years later, in the time of Moses, when the second ‘order’, the Levitical priesthood succeeded the order of Melchizedek, (Hebrews 7:1-10) the Levites ministered in God’s first church, Moses Tabernacle. Each day on the Brazen Altar, both morning and evening, a lamb was sacrificed, along with an Offering of Grain (bread) and a Drink Offering of a ‘hin’ (about a quart or a litre) of wine. (Exodus 29:38-41)

The priests also placed an offering of unleavened bread, once a week on the Sabbath, on the Table of Shewbread. While we do not know the details of the ceremony involved, it certainly included a Drink Offering (i.e. wine) as there were plates, dishes, bowls and pitchers made of pure gold, for the pouring out of drink offerings on the Table.

Jesus came as the fulfilment of the third and final order of the priesthood. He announced this fact at the wedding feast in Cana, changing the water into wine, and consuming it with bread and lamb (He too, was the Lamb of God! Further symbolism.) in the Middle Eastern tradition, reminiscent of Melchizedek’s feast with Abraham. Jesus was also the replacement for the Grain and Drink Offerings, sacrifices required under the second, unsuccessful Levitical Order of the Tabernacle and its successor, the Temple in Jerusalem.

And today too, we are called upon to give thanks for what He symbolically announced at that wedding, through continuing to eat the bread and the wine in remembrance of what He has done for us. Isn’t that amazing? For nothing happens by chance in God!

The coming and the death of Jesus were foreshadowed three times in the Old Testament. (See the Revelation of ...The Foreshadowing of the Cross of Jesus) And here we see that the symbolic celebration of thankfulness and remembrance of His death through the sacrament of Communion, the bread and the wine, was the third and final fulfilment of a ceremony that started over 2000 years before He came!

With our new understanding that the wine Jesus made was symbolic of His blood, being taken with bread too, we can see that Jesus was proclaiming the beginning of the third and final priesthood of God's order. These three forms of priesthood are revealed as being God's plan, one progressively revealed from the beginning of time. The first priesthood of Melchizedek, replaced by the Levitical, and now finally, the ultimate priesthood of Jesus. Amazingly each incorporates the symbolism of the bread and the wine! The Lord's Supper was not just a good idea Jesus had the night before He died, but remains a symbol of the fulfilment of God's three-step Priesthood plan designed from the very beginning of time. Jesus was the final sacrificial lamb, the Saviour of the world. Just incredible! And faith building too!

PART 3

A REVELATION OF..... THE LORD'S SUPPER

THE POWER OF THREE

The celebration of the Lord's Supper, or Communion as it is now widely known, is the third in a series of similar celebrations or remembrances. For nothing in God happens by chance! The coming of Jesus was planned and prophesized from the beginning of time! (See A Revelation of... The Blood of Jesus) The Lord's Supper too, had it's origin 4000 years ago, way, way back in antiquity.

ABRAHAM AND MELCHIZEDEK

When Abram (Before he became Abraham) returned victorious from the battle with King Kedorlaomer and his associates, he gave the king priest Melchizedek, an ancient picture of Jesus, a tithe of the spoils he had acquired. In return, Melchizedek brought out bread and wine as a celebration or remembrance of the event. (Genesis 14:17-20)

MOSES AND THE TABERNACLE

Moving on 600 years, we come to the world's first church, the Tabernacle of Moses, detailed plans of which were given on Mount Sinai. (See A Revelation of... The Church – Past, Present and Future) As is the case with progressive revelation, further truth was revealed.

In the Tabernacle, the most regular offering of all those made on the Bronze Altar for the Israelites sins, was the twice daily, morning and evening sacrifice of a one-year-old lamb, together with accompanying Grain (bread) and Drink (wine) Offerings. A perfect picture of what Jesus would do for us, once and for all, 1500 years later! The Lamb of God, (The

Sacrificial Lamb) whose body would be broken (Grain Offering) and whose blood (Drink Offering) would be shed for us.

JESUS AND THE LAST SUPPER

When Jesus came to be our final sacrificial lamb, the need for the twice-daily sacrifice ceased. This physically happened when the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans on 5 August 70AD and has never been re-instituted into Jewish worship, as there is no longer a temple in which to make the sacrifice. God works too, in the natural as well as the spiritual! And as the Last Supper reveals, the final sacrifice Jesus made on our behalf is to be remembered by breaking bread, symbolic of His battered body and drinking wine, symbolic of His blood poured out for you and me. Isn't it amazing how it all ties in together?

The form of the symbolism would not have come as a complete surprise to the Disciples either, for Jesus had earlier talked about the principles it contains. *‘Jesus said to them, “ I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, ‘How can this man give us his flesh to eat?’ Jesus said to them, ‘I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.’”* (John 6:53-57)¹¹

‘In the same way’ they too, after the Last Supper may well have understood the application of the principles of the Grain and Drink

¹¹*The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.

Offerings to what Jesus had taught, for they undoubtedly participated in these ceremonies at the Temple, when in Jerusalem. As the Apostle Paul said: *“For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”* (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)¹²

The Lord’s Supper symbolises and recognises the fulfilment of God’s eternal plan of reconciliation, in bringing us back to Him through the blood of Jesus. Everything has now been done. His work is finished. All we have to do is believe and obey. Our trust and rest is in Him.

¹²*The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.

A PRAYER OF ACCEPTANCE

If you have read this, not yet having personally accepted the sacrifice Jesus has made on your behalf as revealed through the changing of the water into wine and in the Lord's Supper, here is your opportunity to do so. He died for this moment. He died for you, yes, you! All you need to do is to respond to Him through this prayer.

"Lord Jesus, I need You. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank You for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of the throne of my life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be."

Congratulations and welcome to the Kingdom of God! Please share with another Christian what you have just done, and seek their help in finding a fellowship of believers to support you in living out this decision to make Jesus the Lord of your life. May the Lord bless you as you build an eternal relationship with Him.